1 Introduction

The Belmont General Plan aims to enhance Belmont's cultural, economic, and physical identity.

Preserving Belmont's natural beauty and open space is a priority of the General Plan.

The General Plan aims to create a vibrant, mixed-use town center.

1.1 VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The 2035 General Plan is a policy document for the long-range development of the City of Belmont. It provides the direction for the future growth of the city and articulates a vision of what Belmont aspires to be. The Plan draws its aspirations and goals from the community at large—residents, business owners, and elected officials—and translates these ideas into a set of policies and actions for present and future generations.

This introduction to the General Plan provides an overview of the document and its purpose, use, and policy structure. It highlights key themes, gives the reader a background to the planning process and the requirements for the Plan, describes how the Plan is organized, and explains how it will be administered after it is adopted.

Thirty years after the last comprehensive General Plan Update in 1982, new opportunities, challenges, and approaches have emerged in Belmont. Beginning in autumn of 2014, the General Plan Update process provided an important opportunity for Belmont to take stock of what it has accomplished in the past three decades and lay out a vision for its future. A comprehensive community participation program to obtain the input of residents, business and property owners, City staff, and elected officials was central to the update process, to ensure that the General Plan accurately addressed community needs and values. The outreach included a series of small-group interviews with key stakeholders, four community workshops, three newsletters, a mail-in survey sent to all households, emails, and development of the General Plan 2035 project website, which was updated regularly. Study sessions with the Planning Commission and City Council were held regularly throughout the process as well, providing decision-makers the opportunity to give guidance at key point during plan development.

BELMONT VISION STATEMENT

In October 2003, the City Council adopted a long-range vision statement that was developed under the guidance of the Mayor and Vice Mayor, with seven citizen committees conducting over 40 meetings across a six-month period. Belmont's Vision Statement covered five themes: Distinctive Community Development, Natural Beauty, Thriving Culture, Thriving Economy, and Easy Mobility.

The General Plan Update did not reinvent the efforts of community members to arrive at this Vision Statement, against which City actions have been measured for the last 12 years. Rather, the first General Plan Update workshop was designed to give residents the opportunity to affirm these vision statements and make any changes or additions to reflect

their evolving perspectives, if applicable. Feedback from the community indicated that the 2003 Belmont Vision Statement is still a relevant and valid representation of Belmont residents' desires and priorities. This Vision Statement underpins the goals and policies of the updated General Plan, and each Element of the General Plan is related to the community's Vision. The Belmont Vision Statement is as follows:

Distinctive Community Character

- Belmont prides itself on being unique.

- Its small-town ambience sets it apart as a tranquil, inclusive, safe, and desirable place to live, work and play.

- We get involved in town matters because we care about living here.

- We connect with each other in all kinds of gathering places.

- We value and celebrate a strong commitment to diversity, inclusion, safety, equality and dignity for all individuals in Belmont.

- Our strong sense of community and enjoyment of the town's assets and activities deepen as we become better informed and connected.

Easy Mobility

- We put a priority on getting out of, into, and through town efficiently.

- Bicyclists, walkers, and other nondrivers get where they're going easily and safely.

- We require safe residential streets and smooth-flowing thoroughfares.

Natural Beauty

- We choose to make our home among these beautiful hills, trees, parks, views, and open spaces.

- Our natural surroundings inspire us to play, create, and contemplate.

- Our actions today preserve and enhance Belmont's beauty to make it even lovelier for future generations.

- Our wooded residential areas are diverse, peaceful and well maintained.

Thriving Culture

- Belmont is a wonderfully safe, culturally diverse and supportive place to raise a family.

- We facilitate lifelong learning in our academic, artistic, athletic, and social dimensions and we thrive on interconnection with the rest of the world.

- Our schools and library are the pride of the community. Our university is intrinsic to Belmont's social, artistic and economic life.

- Our playgrounds and athletic fields are of high quality and in high gear.

The General Plan aims to strengthen infrastructure and mobility for multi-modal uses such as public transit, sidewalks, and bike lanes.

- The arts thrive in this creative, appreciative town—the arts hub of the Peninsula.

- Our history makes Belmont what it is, and we preserve that heritage for our children.

Thriving Economy

- A charming, vibrant town center is the heart of our civic and economic life.

- Our economy prospers with a mix of attractive, successful businesses that fit with our community character.

- We look first in our own shops and restaurants for what we need.

- Education, arts and the economy flourish in concert.

1.2 GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

REGIONAL LOCATION

Belmont is located in San Mateo County on the San Francisco Peninsula, halfway between San Francisco and San Jose, shown in Figure 1-1. Covering 4.7 square miles, Belmont enjoys bay marshlands and sloughs in the eastern area and hilly terrain in the western portions of the city. Belmont is at sea level along the marshlands and rises over 800 feet in elevation in the western areas of the city. The city is bisected by El Camino Real, Alameda de las Pulgas, and Caltrain tracks, the peninsula commuter rail line and

transportation corridor running in a north-south direction. Ralston Avenue connects the city and the region in an east-west direction from Highway 92/Interstate 280 to US 101. Belmont is within easy driving distance of the Pacific coast, three major airports, and major employment centers including San Francisco, Silicon Valley, and the East Bay.

PLANNING AREA

The Planning Area is the geographic area for which the General Plan establishes policies about future urban growth and natural resource conservation. Belmont's Planning Area is shown in Figure 1-2. It comprises all land within the city limits as well as neighboring unincorporated land in Belmont's Sphere of Influence (SOI). The SOI refers to land outside of a city's jurisdictional boundary, located in unincorporated areas of a county, but which bears relation to an incorporated area and represents its potential future maximum extent. Belmont's SOI is determined by the San Mateo Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), which is an entity that is empowered to review and approve proposed boundary changes and annexations by incorporated municipalities. Belmont's SOI is located south of Ralston Avenue between Old County Road and US 101 and is known as the Harbor Industrial Area (HIA).

Development began in the Planning Area in the 1890s. The first development occurred near the intersection of Old County Road south of Ralston Avenue, creating the main business district. Development migrated west of Ralston Avenue in the early 1900s. Since its incorporation in 1926, Belmont has grown from a small town of less than 1,000 residents to a community of 26,400 in 2013. Much of the city's population and housing growth occurred during the 1950s and 1960s during the post-war period. Most of the residential neighborhoods are found on the hillsides with many open spaces and parks.

Today, Belmont is a quiet residential community in the midst of the culturally and technologically rich Bay Area. The town center, also known as Belmont Village, is centered on Ralston Avenue and El Camino Real, with convenient access to freeway and rail transportation, and it includes a mix of locally-owned shops and other commercial uses. There are excellent public and private schools in Belmont, as well as the only university in San Mateo County, Notre Dame de Namur. Belmont is also known for its wooded hills, views of the San Francisco Bay, and stretches of open space.

The hillsides of Belmont, where most of the residential neighborhoods reside, shape the unique character of the city.
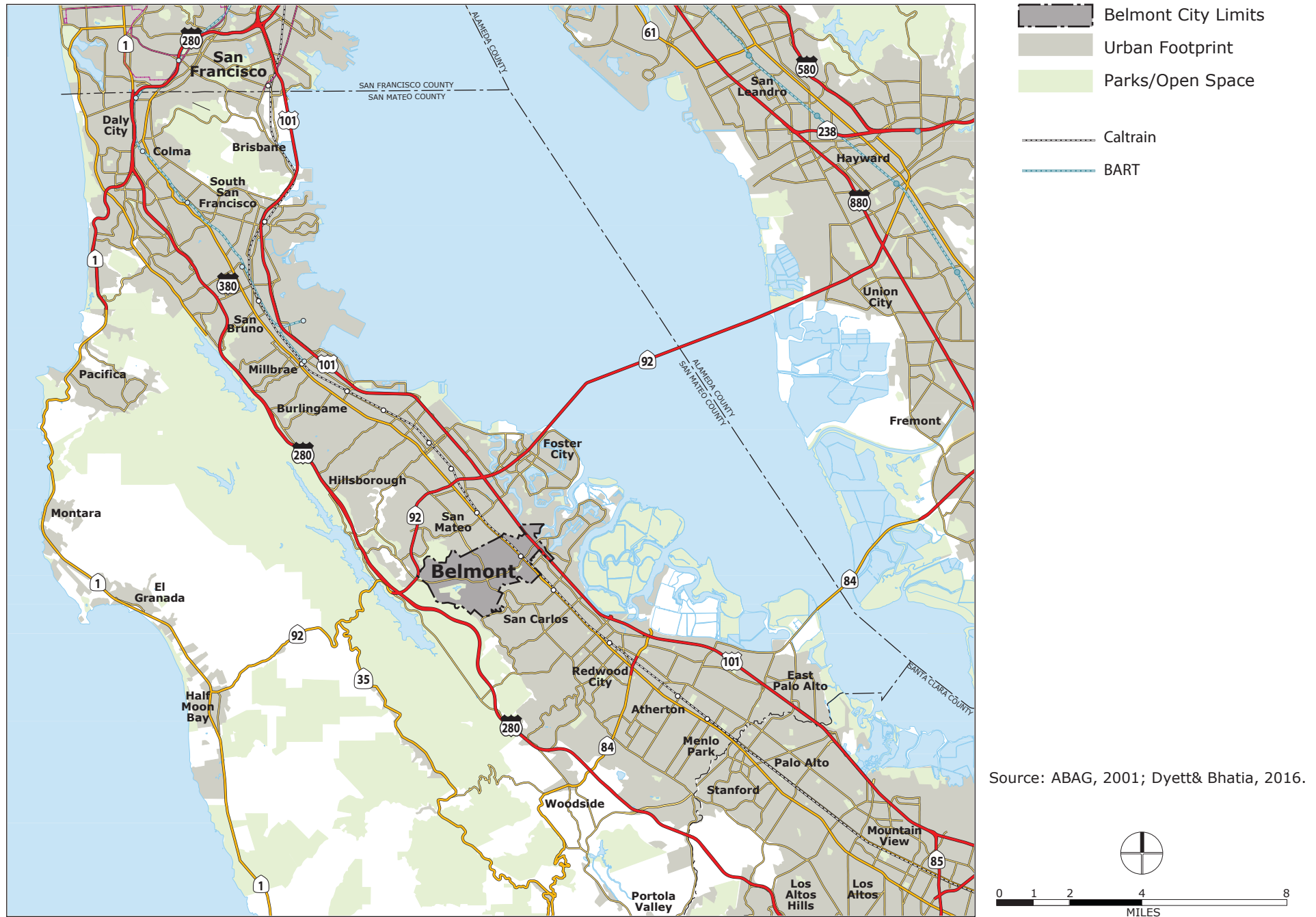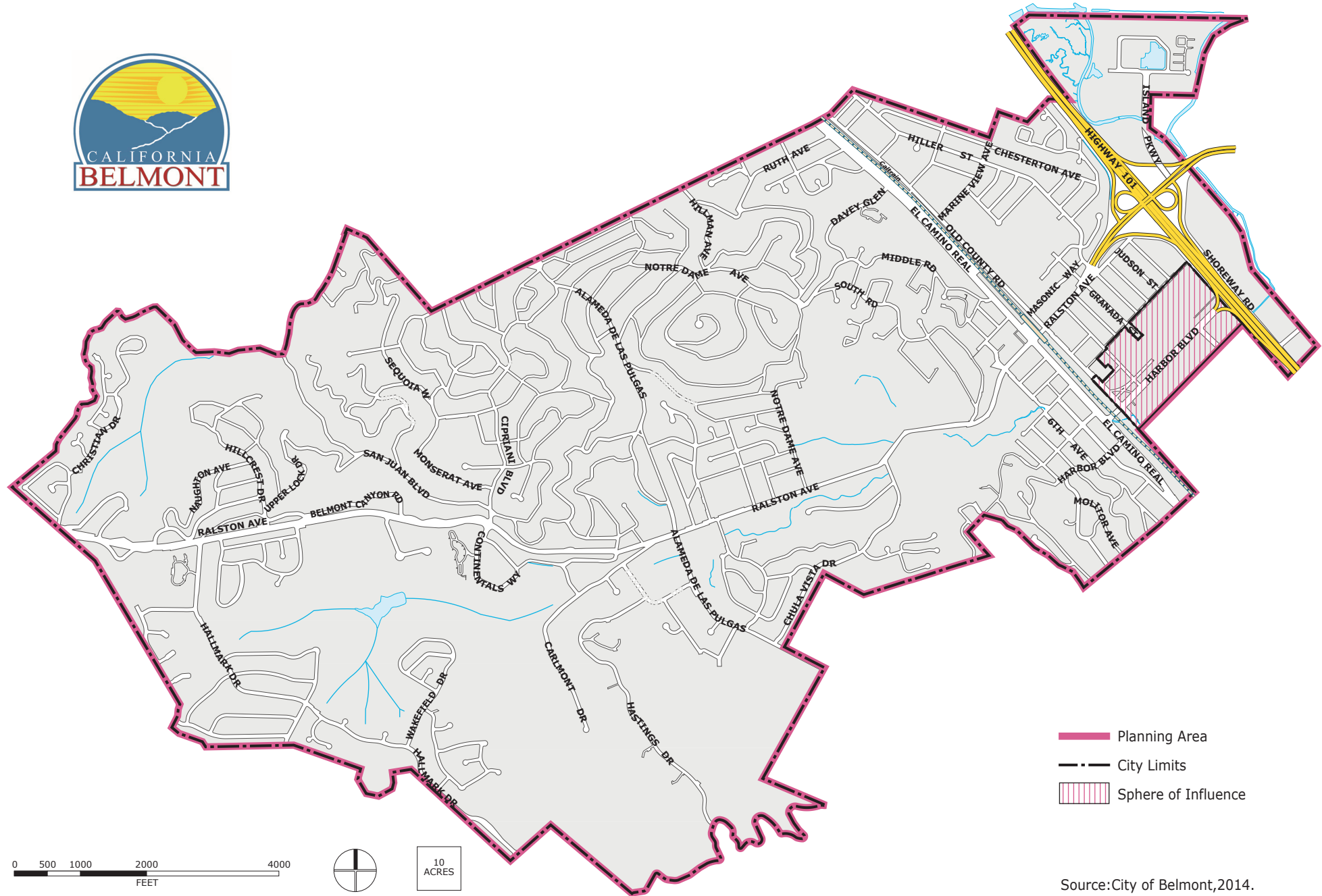
FIGURE 1-1: REGIONAL LOCATION

Legend:
- Belmont City Limits
- Urban Footprint
- Parks/Open Space
- Caltrain
- BART

Source: ABAG, 2001; Dyett& Bhatia, 2016.

MILES

FIGURE 1-2: PLANNING AREA

CALIFORNIA
BELMONT

Planning Area
City Limits
Sphere of Influence

Source: City of Belmont, 2014.

The General Plan outlines a vision for Belmont's long-term physical and economic development and community enhancement.

1.3 GENERAL PLAN SCOPE AND PURPOSE

GENERAL PLAN PURPOSE

The General Plan governs all city actions relating to Belmont's physical development. The General Plan is mandated by and derives its authority from California Government Code Section 65300, which requires each city and county in California to adopt a General Plan, "for the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which…bears relation to its planning." The Belmont General Plan is a document adopted by the City Council that serves several purposes:

- To outline a vision for Belmont's long-term physical and economic development and community enhancement;

- To provide strategies and specific implementing actions that will allow this vision to be accomplished;

- To establish a basis for judging whether specific development proposals and public projects are in harmony with General Plan policies and standards (such as for density, parks, and mobility);

- To allow city departments, other public agencies, and private developers to design projects that will enhance the character of the community, preserve and enhance important environmental resources, and minimize hazards; and

- To provide the basis for establishing priorities for implementing plans and programs, such as the *Zoning Ordinance*, the Capital Improvements Program, facilities plans, and specific and area plans.

State law requires that a variety of city actions be consistent with the General Plan; thus, regular ongoing use of the plan is essential. The Plan is both general and long-range and there will be circumstances and instances when detailed studies are necessary before General Plan policies can be implemented. Successful implementation of the General Plan requires effective communication among city staff, the community and city decision-makers. Public safety, public health, and community values are the primary considerations when making decisions related to implementation of the General Plan.

GENERAL PLAN REQUIREMENTS

A city's general plan has been described as its constitution for development—the framework within which decisions must be made on how to grow, provide public services and facilities, and protect and enhance the environment. California's tradition of allowing local control over land use decisions means that the State's cities have considerable flexibility in preparing their general plans.

While they allow flexibility, State planning laws do establish basic requirements about the issues that general plans must address. The California Government Code establishes both the content of general plans and rules for their adoption and subsequent amendment. Together, State law and judicial decisions establish three overall guidelines for general plans; they should be:

- **Comprehensive.** This requirement has two aspects. First, the general plan must be geographically comprehensive. That is, it must apply throughout the entire incorporated area and it should include other areas that the city determines are relevant to its planning. Second, the general plan must address the full range of issues that affect the city's physical development.

- **Internally Consistent.** This requirement means that the general plan must fully integrate its separate parts and relate them to each other without conflict. "Horizontal" consistency applies as much to figures and diagrams as to the general plan text. It also applies to data and analysis as well as policies. All adopted portions of the general plan, whether required by State law or not, have equal legal weight. None may supersede another, so the general plan must resolve conflicts among the provisions of each element.

- **Long-Range.** Because anticipated development will affect the city and the people who live or work there for years to come, State law requires every general plan to take a long-term perspective.

The General Plan establishes goals for Belmont Village and supports the Specific Plan, which provides detailed strategies and improvements to revitalize the Village.

Transportation improvements in the General Plan are focused on enhancing connectivity at the neighborhood, city, and regional scales.

1.4 GENERAL PLAN KEY STRATEGIES

The General Plan is shaped by strategies to achieve the core values of the Belmont Community Vision. The key strategies include:

- **Preserve Existing Neighborhoods and High Quality of Life.** Most of the city will not see significant changes to the land uses envisioned by the General Plan, including the existing residential neighborhoods. The General Plan supports a wide variety of housing types to provide opportunities for people of all ages and incomes to live in Belmont. The community is united in desiring that Belmont maintain a high quality of life for its residents, including strong public schools and ample parks and open space.

- **Create a Vibrant Downtown Village.** The Belmont community has long desired a true town center in the Village with vibrant, mixed uses that serve residents and visitors alike. The General Plan establishes the goals for the Village and supports the Belmont Village PDA Specific Plan, which provides detailed land use strategies and transportation improvements to revitalize the Village. With implementation of the Specific Plan, new stores and restaurants that cater to residents and stay open later, cultural and entertainment activities that draw people from afar, and an increased population base will infuse the Village with vitality that will also draw new businesses and visitors. With implementation of the Specific Plan and the General Plan, care, attention, investment, and new housing and businesses will rejuvenate the Village, and improved streetscapes, traffic calming, and safe pedestrian access will enhance the public realm and neighborhood livability.

- **Focus Economic Growth in Key Areas.** While the established residential neighborhoods in Belmont are not anticipated to see many changes, the General Plan emphasizes redevelopment and infill opportunities in key focus areas for economic growth, such as the Village and the El Camino Real corridor. Strengthening the Village, revitalizing existing commercial centers and corridors, supporting existing businesses, and increasing the tax base in the city are all priorities in the General Plan.

- **Enhance Connectivity.** Transportation improvements in the General Plan are focused on enhancing connectivity at the neighborhood, city, and regional scales, by improving key corridors, maintaining transportation facilities, and enhancing multimodal mobility. Creating "complete streets" amenable to walking, biking, and transit use, and supporting robust transit

service within the city and beyond are also improvements included in the General Plan.

- **Continue Commitment to Parks, Recreation, and Open Space.** Belmont's hillsides, parks, and other protected open space are prized by community members for their scenic, recreational, and habitat values. Continued preservation is seen as a key accomplishment over the next 20 years. The Plan identifies priorities for open space conservation and strategies to protect open space while allowing limited development to be clustered and designed to fit into its natural setting where allowed and feasible. Enhanced recreational facilities and programs are strongly supported by the Belmont community and the Plan.

- **Improve Infrastructure.** The need for the City to maintain and improve streets, sidewalks, and other infrastructure was a clear consensus point for the community. The General Plan supports completion of planned street projects, especially along key corridors such as Ralston Avenue, El Camino Real, and Alameda de las Pulgas, as well as the pavement preservation program to improve street conditions. Implementation of planned improvements to the storm drainage system is also prioritized in the Plan.

- **Protect from Natural Hazards.** Belmont faces a variety of natural hazards, including fires, earthquake-induced landslides, and flooding. The Plan establishes a land use pattern that reflects hazardous conditions, such as steep slopes, and includes policies to improve public safety services and emergency management.

Providing all residents with access to public and recreational facilities is a priority of the General Plan.

The General Plan supports completion of planned street projects as well as the pavement preservation program to improve street conditions.

A variety of housing types is needed to fit the needs of all Belmont residents.

1.5 GENERAL PLAN HORIZON AND BUILDOUT

One purpose of the General Plan is to ensure that the City can accommodate projected population and job growth over the planning period (to 2035). To meet the requirements of State housing law, the City must also have adequate sites where housing affordable to moderate- and low-income households can reasonably be developed. The Plan seeks to meet these needs while also satisfying other community goals and ensuring safety and environmental protection. This section estimates projected demand for new housing and non-residential space, and the development potential provided under the General Plan land use framework.

Full development under the General Plan is referred to as "buildout." It should be noted that when buildout will actually occur is not specified in or anticipated by the Plan, and designation of a site for a certain use does not necessarily mean that the site will be built or redeveloped with the designated use by 2035, the horizon year of the Plan.

Table 1-1 shows that the population in Belmont is expected to grow by about 4,100 people by 2035, which is an increase of 15.5 percent from the population in 2013 and an annual growth rate of 0.7 percent. By 2035, total households are expected to increase by 1,500 households, or 13.8 percent, with an annual growth rate of 0.6 percent. About 3,300 new jobs are expected in Belmont in 2035, a 32.7 percent increase from the total jobs in 2013, with an annual growth rate of 1.3 percent.

TABLE 1-1: Estimated Buildout Projections for 2035			
	Population	**Households**	**Jobs**
2013	26,400	10,900	10,100
2035	30,500	12,400	13,400

Note: The 2035 buildout projections are the average of the 2035 figures in ABAG's 2013 Projections, which are more conservative, and the 2035 figures interpolated from the County's 2040 travel demand model, which are higher than ABAG 2013 projections and have been updated more recently.

Sources: 2013 figures: C/CAG-VTA 2040 Model; Dyett & Bhatia; Kittelson & Associates, Inc. 2016. 2035 figures: ABAG Projections, 2013; C/CAG-VTA 2040 Model; Dyett & Bhatia; Kittelson & Associates, Inc. 2016.

1.6 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS AND REGULATIONS

The General Plan provides the basis for all of the City's regulations, policies and programs that relate to issues addressed in the Plan. In addition to requiring that the Plan be internally consistent, the State also requires "vertical consistency"—i.e., consistency between the General Plan and other City actions. This requirement means that the City's zoning and subdivision ordinances, specific plans, all development approvals, public works projects, and open space implementation programs have to be consistent with the General Plan.

The State's General Plan Guidelines provide the following rule for defining consistency: "An action, program, or project is consistent with the general plan if, considering all its aspects, it will further the objectives and policies of the general plan and not obstruct their attainment." This rule gives the City flexibility in implementation. Because the Plan is both general and long-range, there are many circumstances where future City actions will be addressed only generally in the Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

The General Plan is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Report to inform the community and decision-makers on the environmental implications of the General Plan and a range of potential alternatives. The General Plan is "self-mitigating" in that it includes policies and programs to mitigate potential significant environmental impacts associated with development under the Plan, where possible.

OTHER PLANS AND IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMS

The City maintains several specific, area, and master plans. These may cover a specific geographic area, such as the Village; a specific topic, such as bikeways; or facilities, such as parks or sewers. As per State law, these documents, as well as implementing programs such as the Capital Improvements Program, are required to be consistent with the General Plan.

BELMONT VILLAGE SPECIFIC PLAN
HEARING DRAFT | NOVEMBER 2017
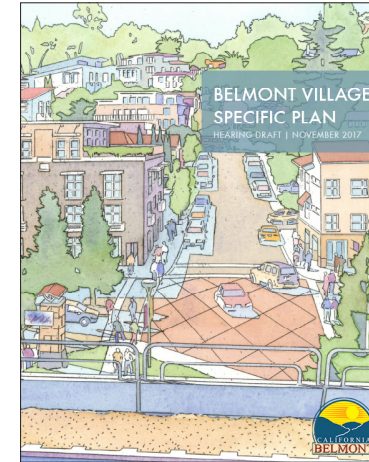
CONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE GENERAL PLAN AND ZONING

The City's *Zoning Ordinance* is one of the most important tools for implementing the Plan. Following Plan adoption, zoning must be revised to be consistent with the General Plan, as needed. Requirements for consistency between the General Plan and zoning can be broken down into three aspects:

- **Uses and Standards.** The General Plan's land use classifications are more general than the *Zoning Ordinance* classifications. For example, the Plan has four categories for residential use, while the *Zoning Ordinance* may have more. Multiple zoning districts may be consistent with a single General Plan residential classification, as long as all of the densities and unit types allowed in each zoning district are also permitted in the relevant General Plan category.

- **Spatial Correlation.** The Zoning Map should reflect the general pattern of land use depicted on the General Plan Land Use Diagram. However the two need not be identical. In particular, specific plan areas, such as the Belmont Village PDA, are given a single General Plan land use designation with overall density/intensity requirements; precise planning for those areas is addressed in the specific plan and in the zoning regulations.

- **Timing.** State law allows a "reasonable time" for updating and reconciling the *Zoning Ordinance* with the General Plan. The General Plan has a 20-year horizon, while zoning focuses on the immediate appropriate uses for individual sites. In addition, all land within city limits should be zoned in accordance with the General Plan land use designations. In instances where land outside the city limits, such as the HIA, is designated on the General Plan Diagram, these designated uses can be applied at the time of annexation using master planning, specific plans, and prezoning.

Many General Plan policies and actions, in particular those in the Land Use Element, call for specific changes to be made to the *Zoning Ordinance*.

1.7 GUIDE TO USING THIS DOCUMENT

The Plan is organized by topic in chapters, or elements, as follows.

1. **Introduction.** This chapter summarizes the key themes and initiatives of the Plan. It covers the Plan's purpose, process, planning context, State requirements, relationships to other plans, Plan organization, and requirements for administration of the Plan.

2. **Land Use.** This Element describes the existing land use pattern and provides the physical framework for land use and development in the city. The Land Use Element also contains urban design policies to improve the city's visual quality and livability, including its neighborhoods, mixed-use areas, and hillside areas. It also describes the economic context and sets out goals and policies to stimulate development, maintain fiscal health, and support other efforts to enhance the city's economy. Lastly, the Land Use Element also addresses historic resources and historic preservation in Belmont. *This Element is required by State law.*

3. **Circulation.** This Element includes policies, programs, and standards to maintain efficient circulation for all modes of travel. It identifies future street and traffic improvements, and addresses walking, biking, transit, and parking to enable a multi-modal circulation system. *This Element is required by State law.*

4. **Parks, Recreation, and Open Space.** This element contains goals and policies relating to parks and recreation facilities and open space for recreation in Belmont. *An Open Space Element is required by State law.*

5. **Conservation.** This Element includes goals and policies relating to open space for natural resources; biological resources; hydrology, water quality, water supply and demand; waste water, solid waste, and stormwater management; air quality and climate change; and archaeological and paleontological resources. *This Element is required by State law.*

6. **Safety.** This Element addresses the risks posed by seismic and geologic hazards, flooding, hazardous materials, and wildland fires. It also includes policies on utilities, such as electricity, natural gas, and telecommunications facilities. Public safety services and emergency management are also addressed. *This Element is required by State law.*

7. **Noise.** This Element includes policies to limit the impacts of noise sources through land use planning, site planning, building design requirements, and other measures. *This Element is required by State law.*

8. **Housing.** According to State law, the Housing Element must be updated more frequently than the rest of the General Plan, so it is not included under this cover of the General Plan and is instead contained in a separate document. The Housing Element must meet a variety of statutory requirements, and the six other Elements in this General Plan are consistent with and supportive of policies and programs in the Housing Element. Future updates to the Housing Element will be consistent with and supportive of the Elements in this General Plan. *This Element is required by State law.*

ELEMENT STRUCTURE

Goals, Policies, and Actions

Each Element of the Plan includes background information to establish the context for policies in the chapter. This background material is neither a comprehensive statement of existing conditions nor does it contain adopted information. This background information is followed by goals, policies, and actions, which together articulate a vision for Belmont that the Plan seeks to achieve.

- **Goals** are an ideal future end related to the public health, safety, or general welfare of the community; they set directions for policies and actions.

- **Policies** are specified ends or conditions that are an intermediate step towards attaining a goal; they are specific statements to guide decision-making.

- **Actions** are measures to implement policies, and they may refer to existing programs or call for establishment of new ones.

Goals and policies provide guidance for development review, infrastructure planning, community facilities and services, and protection for the city's resources, by establishing planning requirements, programs, standards, and criteria for project review. Explanatory material or commentary accompanies some policies. Commentary provides background information or is intended to guide Plan implementation. The use of "should" or "would" indicates that a statement is advisory, not binding; details will need to be resolved in General Plan implementation. Where the same topic is addressed in more than one chapter, sections and policies are cross-referenced.

Goals, policies, and actions are organized using a four-part numbering system. The first part refers to the element number and the second is the order in which the goal appears. The third number refers to the policy corresponded with the goal. Actions have a letter at the end to distinguish them. For example, the first goal in the Land Use Element would be Goal 2.1; the first policy

would be Policy 2.1-1; and the first action is Action 2.1-1a.

Diagrams and Maps

Each Element contains maps and diagrams that illustrate policies relating to land use, circulation, conservation, and other topics. The Land Use Diagram, other figures, and the Land Use Classifications are adopted parts of the Plan.

1.8 ADMINISTRATION OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan is intended to be a dynamic document. As such, it will be updated periodically to address site-specific or comprehensive needs, to respond to new State or federal law, or to modify policies that may become obsolete or unrealistic over time.

AMENDMENTS TO THE PLAN

The Plan may be amended from time to time, but per State Government Code Section 65358, opportunities for such amendments are limited to four times per year. As Belmont is a General Law city, it is subject to this requirement. Each amendment may make an unlimited number of changes to the Plan. However, this restriction does not apply to optional elements, to amendments needed to comply with a court decision, or to allow for the development of affordable housing.

ANNUAL REPORT

The California Government Code requires that City staff submit an annual report to the City Council on the status of the General Plan and progress in its implementation. This report is submitted to the Governor's Office on Planning and Research and the Department of Housing and Community Development. The report must include an analysis of the progress made in meeting the City's share of regional housing needs (identified in the Housing Element) and local efforts to remove governmental constraints to the maintenance, improvement, and development of affordable housing. Also, any mitigation monitoring and reporting requirements prescribed in the General Plan EIR should be included in the annual report. Finally, the report should also include a summary of all General Plan amendments adopted during the preceding year, a description of upcoming projects or General Plan issues to be addressed in the coming year, and a work program.

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